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# THE SOCIAL HERITAGE OF THE INDIAN GIRL

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Every endeavor to understand the American Indian girl of to-day is dependent upon an appreciation of the two great influences which have been most important in her life. The first of these is the influence of the earlier life of her race, or her social heritage. It is true, however, that a knowledge of the more remote past and the reservation life of the Indian girl is not sufficient unless we add to it, in the second place, an equal understanding of the influence of school life upon the same type of girl.

To-day, in contrast to the situation in even the recent past, her life and thought are centered about her school. During her school days the Indian girl must be helped to make her adjustment to a new world. She must begin to assume the great responsibility of piloting her people as well as herself from a primitive to a highly complex civilization. In comparatively few years her people are hurrying through those centuries which other races have found necessary for their gradual development. She needs also to find ways by which our complex civilization may be enriched by the varied gifts of her race.

The help which the Indian girl requires for this stupendous task must come from those who understand her and her needs. It is impossible, however, for any one person to know from experience Indian life of the past and present, on the reservations and in communities outside where many of the girls are living or seeking employment, and also in the boarding school to which the Indian young people go.

In this article therefore we have gathered from the experiences of many people, including Indian young women themselves, suggestions for help in the interpretation of the Indian girl to those who desire to come to her aid.

Because the school is the center in which these girls must make the greatest adjustments, these considerations are limited to questions and problems arising from their life with others in this place which is having the most vital influence on the Indian young people, the Government Indian schools throughout the United States.

### WHAT IS THE INDIAN GIRL LIKE?

In this question are included the following which are typical of the many questions which show confusion of thought and desire for understanding on the part of those who are interested in the Indian girl.

"Why are Indian girls so often silent when they could explain if they would?"

"Why can we never depend upon them to do things on time?"

"Why do Indian customs, home relationships and friendships seem so different from ours?"

"Is there anything in their past worth preserving?"

"How can we ever learn to understand them?"

These seemingly superficial questions led us to use all possible resources in a study of the fundamental problems and Indian characteristics underlying them. We have gathered our conclusions around the following remarks which are frequently heard when the Indian girl is mentioned:

Are they always silent?

Why are they so slow?

They are always borrowing others possessions and giving theirs away.

When will they ever learn to reason things out instead of just following their impulses?

What do they need most of all?

We shall consider each of these in turn.

## ALWAYS SILENT?

An Indian trait most frequently mentioned is silence. This is interpreted by some as shyness or reserve, and by others as disrespect, insolence and resentfulness. Perhaps these traits can best be illustrated by an incident more or less typical of the numerous illustrations that friends of the Indian girl might give.

One day a little girl came in from a remote corner of a reservation to the school. She was overawed at the great buildings and at all the new and strange things which she saw about her. After much scrubbing and dressing she was conducted to the school-room over which an imposing lady presided. In a few minutes this lady asked her a question. The girl's awe and embarrassment were overwhelming. To think that so important a person representing the Great White Father at Washington should desire information from her. Speech was impossible and even if sounds could have come from her tightened throat how could she ever think of a formal speech! She hung her head and tried to compose a fitting reply, struggling to her feet as she did so. The class waited in expectancy. This changed subtly to sympathy for they all appreciated the struggle in her mind.

A teacher inexperienced in Indian ways, with patience exhausted, would have shown her irritation and left the bewildered girl wondering for days and days how she had so offended this great Government for which she had such awe and respect. But this teacher, wise and instinctively understanding, with a knowledge of newer methods of education, though not fully realizing what was passing in the girl's mind, knew how to bring to the child's assistance the help of the other children who did understand.

Unfortunately, many of us who work with other races do not have the wisdom of this teacher. Then as time goes on, the Indian girls, less bewildered, begin to question our intentions or even our sincerity in the face of nervous, irritable, Anglo-Saxon ways. Their awe and respect change to irritation at themselves because they have not understood. This in turn gives place to irritation at our stupidity, then to resentment, and even in some instances to lack of trust and respect for the white race. The outward result of this cycle of experience shows on the part of some girls in increasing silence, on the part of others in a quick, resentful toss of the head or a disdainful muttering. If the girl is driven too far there is a sharp retort. It is not to be wondered at that some are inclined to conclude that the girl is stubborn, impudent or insolent.

But where are we at fault in summarily dismissing her with this hasty conclusion? Let us consider these reactions of the girl in the light of her heritage from the past and the conflict of forces playing upon her in the present. From our experience of the present home and school life of the girls, and our knowledge of the life of the past, we have found that the following facts have helped us in our understanding.

Quietness, dignity, and reserve are conspicuous in all Indian life. There is great respect for authority and age, and great formality with elders. In the past the rule of the grandparents was never questioned. No replies were made without thoughtful consideration. It was the custom, when old chiefs were asked questions by representatives of the Government, to reply in a formal speech. Even to-day, at an "Indian hearing," the white chairman reacts to the innate courtesy and dignified bearing of the Indian witness by rising, bowing in greeting, shaking hands in stately fashion and listening to the quiet, well thought out, formal speech in reply to his brief question.

The Indian people are not loquacious. As a young Indian woman has said, "The Indian people do not see any necessity for talking all the time; conversation may lag without panic. Neither is it necessary nor good form to broadcast all one's innermost feelings or even convictions." A little Indian girl expressed it thus, "You know you ask us things you know already yourself."

It is also necessary to remember that a great many of the Indian young people in school are endeavoring to think in a language which is essentially foreign to them. The interests of the people with whom they are now in touch are also foreign to them and the majority have not yet reached the stage at which they are interested in the printed word upon which conversation is so generally built. We must not forget that, because they are extremely sensitive, as one would expect of a people isolated from others, their self-effacement is frequently evident. When they are not sure that they understand or will be understood, they dislike exposing ignorance, and as one of their number has said, "Not being successful bluffers, they will often not try to express themselves."

There are other reasons also for a girl's silence. Sometimes it is fear of being laughed at, and at other times it is such a deep regard for the feelings of her friends, that, for example, when they fail or are unable to recite in school, she also may refuse to recite rather than hurt her friend's feelings or seem to appear superior. And then, again, in the communism of tribal life it is not good form to laud one's self above another, a touch perhaps of the primitive idea that the gods are jealous of superiority and send affliction upon mortals who approach perfection. Some of us still "knock on wood."

We should continually remind ourselves that these facts, which can be illustrated by numerous other incidents, may be the explanation of an Indian girl's "exasperating silence."

#### ALWAYS SLOW?

A second Indian trait frequently mentioned in connection with the Indian girls, is slowness. This is often associated with the failure to persist, inability to take account of time, carelessness, and the habit of leaving things undone. It is quite easy for the older person, beginning her acquaintance with Indian girls, to draw the conclusion that they are lacking in ambition, are lazy and not dependable. Let us consider these ideas.

People who live as members of a clan or tribe, in any group larger than the family, think mostly in terms of the larger group. The Indian hunter sought food not alone for his family but for the larger group to which he belonged. His prowess in war brought reputation to his whole tribe. The success of the group, or the glory that came to the group came to all in the group. Each individual felt as his own the glory reflected on him. The defeat of the group was his own defeat. The shame of the group his own shame. Except in the carrying out of some ancient religious rites, he was never alone in his experiences. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Indian girls find group activities peculiarly satisfying. On the other hand, and most important for our understanding, individual tasks, individual responsibilities and efforts are frequently described by the adjectives "lonely." Discouragement comes quickly without the help, the enthusiasm, and encouragement of a group. Poor playing on the part of one or two, or defeat of the team in the first half of a ball game, make enthusiastic entrance into the second half difficult.

Any girl finds that leaving her family for school or for life in another place is difficult, and she is lonely. The necessity of forming new habits away from those of her community, as well as her family, is another element increasing her loneliness. How much more difficult it is for the Indian girl and how much



more lonely she is when she leaves not only her family but the larger group whose ties are far stronger than those of a white girl's community!

Another element in Indian life which makes group action possible, but individual initiative difficult, is the fact that time in the old life was not regulated by clocks and watches. The call of the crier brought to the entire group the knowledge of the next great event in the life of the day. The slant of the shadows told the approximate moment. The ordinary individual did not have to pay attention to such a minute detail as a moment or second. The one whose business it was, managed time for the majority. Later the bells in school took the place of the crier. But when bells are out of order or not understood, or duties arise for which no bell gives summons the girl is frequently not where she is supposed to be. "Late" or "slow," "careless" or "lazy" is the verdict passed upon her.

Not only are the girls unused to minute division of time, but the intricacies of organization in a Government Indian school, not to mention that far greater differentiation outside the school in the life of to-day, are generations away from the very loosely organized community of which the girls have been a part. No wonder that under present educational methods, things are left undone unless carefully and firmly supervised. Both girls and "grown ups" are driven by the numberless tasks facing them daily. The girls realize that they are not getting their work done, and also that they are not doing it well. They feel unable, as it were, to "catch up with themselves" and bring order out of the chaos which this speeding up of life has brought to their minds.

It is a fact in education that we like what we do successfully. How can the Indian girl like what she must do if she carries with her in connection with the task an overwhelming sense of defeat! Slow, careful explanation of her task and of its relation to the whole life of the school, to time and to bells, with understanding of the reasons for them, will help to clear the muddle in the girl's mind. It will assist her adjustment to the new, highly organized social order into which both she and all in school have been plunged, and in which the lives of all of us will continue, at least for some time, to be cast. In addition to these factors, those of us who are older must remember that the Indian girls who are facing the adjustments of a new way of life, in a new social order, with a new and strange group of individuals are, in the majority of cases, at the very same time facing the always difficult adjustments of adolescence. The strain of all this on the nervous system is almost overwhelming, and, without the understanding and sympathy of older friends, it can easily plunge the girl into a breakdown in health. This happens all too frequently as we know. The problem of adolescence is the problem of all girls, but for the Indian girls the nearness of their past with its different social system intensifies it at every step.

All these factors which enter into the girl's difficulties in changing to new methods of carrying on the day's work help us to understand the slowness and these other "puzzling ways" of the Indian girls.

#### BORROWING AND GIVING AWAY

In the third place, when the Indian girl is the theme of conversation, there is much discussion about her propensity for borrowing. This may be a borrowing of her neighbor's possessions which she may or may not return. It may also be a borrowing of food and of money. The opposite problem of giving away one's possessions is peculiar to girls of certain tribes.

Matrons in an Indian school know well the complications which arise over the ever-present difficulties of borrowing. This girl can not find her dress. Another has lost her belt. Even shoes may be borrowed. At her home we

find the parents wondering how one girl wears out so many sweaters. "Tell my girl she must keep her own things" they command. This command is the ineffective method of dealing with a situation used by a people, confused in thought and hard pushed, as they face some of the facts of the economic system of a new social stage. They could never have dreamed of preparing the girl for meeting this new system since it is her deficiency that is bringing them their first knowledge of it. At school we find many wondering if it can be possible that the girls steal and are dishonest.

It is true, of course, that in any school some have more clothes and trinkets than others. Borrowing sometimes has beneath it not only the desire for necessities but for luxuries with which to adorn oneself. We need to remember that this period of adolescence shows not only in physical development, but in the desire for little details of outward adornment. Back in the history of the human race it was the male who adorned himself in trinkets and colors, but to-day no one can outshine the girl in her teens. At home the adornments of the family could be used by any member as occasion required. One can not borrow when all possessions are held in common.

Closely connected with this problem of borrowing is the custom of giving. A few years ago an Indian girl went for the first time to a school among girls of a tribe which had always conquered hers in warfare. About the third day after her arrival she was asked by the matron where the clean clothes she had brought with her were, and her trunk was found to be empty. After much friendly urging she explained that she had given away all her possessions to the girls whose favor she was trying to win. In many sections the same custom at a wedding, a feast or a funeral may leave an entire family destitute for weeks to come.

When the girl is confronted by the question of why she has appropriated another girl's possessions or has let another take hers, her natural instinct to defend herself in the face of an accusing look, even though she may feel that she has done nothing wrong, makes her self-conscious. She wonders which of our standards she has this time transgressed. To defend herself she may even tell that which is untrue. It is all too easy to conclude that the girl is dishonest or even that she steals.

Food also is free to all in an Indian community. Hospitality is the law of the land. The cowboy sign over the table in a shack on the western ranch ran as follows: "Welcome, stay as long as you can, eat all you wish, but, darn you, wash the dishes!" The last phrase is an affectionate reminder of his home standards. The Indian would not add the last phrase, nor in fact need to put up any sign, for all in his home is open and free. Therefore food in a girl's room belongs to all and is appropriated freely.

Some may think of contradictions to the statements made above. They remember the apparent selfishness of various Indian girls who kept their candy tied in a handkerchief, carefully concealed behind their backs. Some little folks have even been known to hide food in their beds. We forget the days when crops failed, the hunt was unsuccessful, and each one in the entire community conserved every morsel of food to be given, if the worst came to pass, to those who must fight. There were days when food was abundant and all ate as much as possible and then carefully saved the remainder for the lean times.

Irregularity of meals even to-day, in many parts of the Indian country, is another reason why children frequently hide what is left over to be eaten later in the day. From this uncertainty of supply and demand came the custom, still observed in some places, of carrying away what is left on the table. This

act also shows one's appreciation of hospitality. As the supply of food became regular the former customs gave way to the courteous thanking of one's hostess before leaving. In some Indian places this should be done at the table if one would be considered truly polite.

The questions of borrowing, carelessness in the use of money, and constantly writing home for more, are harder for us to understand. They are a source of difficulty to matrons and school authorities and a great worry to parents, to say nothing of her own girl friends from whom a girl borrows.

We have to remember that money as a medium of exchange came with a more modern economic life than that to which the Indian people as a whole have yet attained. "What do we want those little stones for? We want red calico!" was the remark of some Indian women in the early days which are not so remote after all. Even to-day on many reservations the trading post is a place of barter, with rugs or handicraft exchanged for food supplies and wearing apparel. Moreover, the old rationing and reservation system, with its paternalistic care of the Indian wards of the Government, was not organized to educate the Indian people in the development of their own economic life and in the use of money.

It is unfair, however, to put the blame entirely on the reservation system. At the time of its establishment we were living in an age of paternalism, and the protection of the Indians as children seemed the ideal. We planned and arranged some phases of their lives for them, and they followed our plans. To-day the world is experimenting with new methods. Individuals, organizations, even whole nations, are trying new ways of living. In education we hear again and again that we must start where the child is, and so arrange the environment that he can practice with satisfaction to himself those habits which he needs to form in order to live well as an individual in his social group. The very push of life is compelling the Indian people to learn how to manage better their own financial affairs. There is need for the development and acceptance of a modern economic status. The burden of creating and promoting new economic understanding rests upon the Indian young people of to-day. Unfortunately, upon them falls the blame of society because they have not made this adjustment rapidly enough. Upon their friends rests the responsibility of helping them to work out this difficult and intricate problem which is before them in their school days, but which comes upon them with added force when they go out into town and city away from reservation and school to earn their own living with people who have no understanding of their past.

Therefore, when the Indian people sufficiently understand the need of an economic system in their life to-day, and feel more responsibility for establishing their own, then some of these questions may begin to be solved.

#### FOLLOWING REASON OR IMPULSE?

In the fourth place the Indian girls are frequently charged with an oversensitiveness to correction and praise, homesickness and running away, a lack of discrimination in personal habits and "silliness" with boys, all of which are more or less connected.

The older person looking on frequently decides that the Indian girls are quickly offended, unruly, and even immoral.

A small incident, even a slight difference in tone of voice, may change life for those who are over much aware of the persons and things surrounding them, and who are swayed by impulse because they lack opportunity for complete understanding of a situation. A fine, eager Indian girl, who had never before gone to school, was asked by the seamstress in the boarding school to



which she had come to go over to the laundry for the basket of clothes which needed to be mended. She desired to respond quickly to every request but was too shy to say that she did not understand. Her mind went rapidly over the well-ordered school to find what might have been left undone that morning. The wood box was untouched. She disappeared. After a little, another girl, sent to look for her, found her outside the back door carefully cleaning out the big wood box. Fortunately, the girl who was sent had herself been through something of the same experience when she first entered school and she explained the ludicrous mistake in a combination of English and their own language. They laughed together over the joke and the clothes appeared in due time.

The ending might have been quite different. "Why are you cleaning that wood box? We are waiting for those clothes. Hurry up and get them." These words, in an impatient tone of voice, could easily have brought about the following situation. Sensitive to the tone of rebuke and bewildered, the girl would finally understand and resent the injustice to herself. She would be deeply hurt for she had been putting forth her best efforts. Even at this point the older person who really cared about the girl could save the situation by a gentle explanation and frank regret that her own impatience was the ultimate cause of the difficulty. Another kind of older person who merely considered the situation an awkward one, calling for the use of authority, would bring further complications. Some girls at this point might become angry and seek the first opportunity to confide their troubles to a girl or even a boy friend. Without help they would be likely to despair of the whole idea of "getting an education" and run away either alone or with their sympathizing friend. Other girls might ponder the misunderstanding. Their discouragement at the difficulties would increase. They would long for home, the place where they were understood and where life was more simple. It takes great courage in the face of all this difficulty of understanding to stay in school. Some run away. Many, however, stay and reap a reward in the development of character.

There are other kinds of "running away" in all schools. The news of illness at home, the running away of a friend who insists upon company, failure in examinations, a sense of guilt because of violation of rules, a desire for more money in order to dress like other girls, all these are also reasons for running away. Two dandelions held before the school at opening exercises one morning, with these words, "Children, spring has come," started three little boys at recess for the reservation. If the older person could remember that the habits of the Indian boys and girls center in devotion to family, life in the open in the springtime, loyalty to friends, a slavish adherence to the customs and modes of life and dress of the group, then she would be able to find the especial underlying cause and treat each case individually. She could help the girl to understand why she longs to go home. She could help her to begin the formation of new habits that would assist in her adaptation to the new life which she must live.

Another kind of sensitiveness which needs serious consideration is that which arises because of the human desire for praise or recognition. The girl's extreme desire for praise may look to the conscientious teacher, who day by day is doing her duty without it, as a foolish and shallow desire for flattery on the part of the girl. Let us again think back to the girl's life on the reservation. Its organization is simple. She knows its demands and knows when she has conformed to them. She seldom is praised for doing this nor does she need it, as her knowledge of the situation and her own part well played in it bring to her her own inner commendation and satisfaction. In other words she can judge herself and praise herself.

This girl comes to school. The life is highly organized in a way which she does not at all understand. She is bewildered by the numerous "lineups," bells and rules which must be obeyed. It is so easy to be impatient with her blank expression and lagging feet and not really to see the trepidation underneath as she tries to heed the bells. If the girls were alone, the teacher or matron would see the difficulty. When there are a hundred, more or less, new girls in the same plight, there is not always time nor physical energy to give the word of praise which the girl needs to prove to herself that she is doing the right thing, and to know that her teachers recognize her spirit as willing. But such praise would renew her courage to keep at it and would help the girl make the transition to the time when she will know within herself that she is right and will no longer need outward praise.

Again, the Indian girl is over sensitive because she does not understand that some system of rules is necessary in a large community to enable people to live comfortably together. Her first thought is that she is not being trusted to come and go as she did at home. She was accustomed to restraint at home, to the watchful eye of her grandmother, to the company of her mother or married sister, to the disapproval of her clan or group when she did not conform either in dress or action. She was aware, however, only occasionally of these restraints. She is very much aware of school rules. If some one could interpret to her that all living together requires rules either outward or inward, that she has always lived under rules, and that their place is now being taken by school rules, then she would be more likely to understand. With more help she might also learn that rules are like a temporary support, an outward means of maintaining the happiness of all until one's inner restraints and appreciation of the rights of others are developed.

Modern life is showing us that there is great need for the study of the reasons why rules and laws are so little understood and so frequently disregarded. Some people think that the more or less military attitude needs to be emphasized, others that student initiative in making rules, called student government, is better, and still others that the town meeting or Indian council idea including all members of the community in the discussion and formulation of the rules of the community will solve the difficulties. Surely a study of these methods of self-government on the part of the Indian schools would add to the thinking of educators everywhere.

There are some who think that the Indian girls show lack of discrimination and of a fine sensitiveness to their surroundings. They immediately think of the untidiness and disrumped condition of these girls on arrival in school and the difficulty of teaching some to care properly for their persons, rooms, and clothing. Perhaps they do not know how precious every drop of water is in some Indian communities, nor how much some of these girls who are least used to it really appreciate and wonder at the joys of a bath with plenty of water. "It seems like I never could get out of the bath tub when I get back in school," said one such child. We are apt to think that because of huddled conditions of life in Indian homes, there is not the fineness of feeling and respect for each other which really do exist. It is a great offense among the Indian people to "look too hard" at others even when they are fully clothed. Sometimes the girls are indignant when some over-careful older person not only appears unexpectedly in their rooms but examines their clothing too scrupulously. It is difficult to find methods by which girls can be helped in their appreciation of better health habits and still not offend the innate modesty of the Indian race.

The more difficult the question of relationship with boys is not only an Indian problem but a problem of adolescence everywhere, aggravated by the fact, before mentioned, that the Indian girls are emerging from a social system

differing in many ways from the one in which we are living. One example may suffice to show why frequently in the Indian girl's mind there may be misunderstanding of our family relationships and ways and great confusion of thought. The majority of the Indian girls in schools to-day have come from a matriarchal system. In this system, descent is through the mother's line, and the sisters of the girl's mother as well as the brothers of her father, are often called her mothers and fathers. Most teachers in Indian schools have at some time found difficulty in knowing whether a girl's "brother," is really her brother, cousin or even more distant relative. The girl herself has found explanation equally difficult and has taken refuge in a reiteration of the truth as she saw it, in the words, "He is my brother."

The whole problem of the relationship between the boys and girls is complicated by the fact that at the age when the Indian girl, if remaining at home, would have married, she is now being kept in school. In the old days it was not customary for even brothers and sisters to play together after childhood. One Indian grandmother tells how in her young girlhood her grandmother sat in the door of the tent with the shoulder blade of a calf in her hand ready forcibly to prevent the young girls of the home from leaving the tent unaccompanied by a responsible elder.

It is as the Indian girls come in touch with us and our guarded way of speech regarding questions of relationships of the sexes and of the creation of new life that they begin to think that there must be evil in it all of which they should be ashamed.

The Indian girl's problem is not exactly the problem of other girls. Frequently she is not ignorant of actual physical facts, but she is ignorant of some of the finer interpretations of these facts. Self-conscious, bewildered by our various attitudes toward the subject, she believes that she must consider that which she thought was good evil, and she hesitates to ask why. Her self-consciousness has increased with the presence of the boys so near and yet so far away, who are also struggling in a similar unfortunate combination of misunderstanding. Out of all this has come an unnatural and unhealthy state of mind which is behind the notes which are sometimes written, and the actions that follow.

The Indian young people do not know that it is only recently that we are all beginning to discuss how far from possible it is for us in this modern world to live on the physical and material plane alone. We are only beginning to discover that much of the creative energy of human life that used to be expressed chiefly in the preservation of the race can also be used in other creative ways. We are just beginning to put into words the truth that creative energy belongs to all realms of our lives, the physical, mental and the spiritual, and that through all of these realms it finds outlets.

It is all of this which the Indian girls need to understand as a foundation for the building of a fine quality of life in the midst of much that is far from beautiful. Through what channels can the Indian young people find opportunities to use their energies? There is a great need for study and experiment both on the part of the girls and their friends before this vital question can be answered adequately. "Through their religious life expressed in action day by day," will be the answer given by some. "Through a better family and home life," others add, "with more opportunity for health, education, and better advantages for their children." "Through the revival of the Indian arts and opportunity for the greater expression of their own innate appreciation of the beautiful," is still another answer.



The following very practical, immediate help has been suggested by an Indian young women whose experience with boys and girls has been great. "The way to meet the problem seems to me to lie in health education in all its many branches. By means of a freer, wholesome social life, of which recreation is a large part, conditions on the reservation and in schools can be gradually changed and become more pleasant. The young people can learn how to enjoy each other's company in the right way. Clubs can be organized where the young people will meet for a common purpose, perhaps to work for some special object of the school or community, and incidentally there should be some games and refreshments. In this way, life will be socially improved and boys and girls will have the knowledge of how to have a good time together in a clean, wholesome Christian way."

A vital, spiritual interpretation of the facts of life, opportunities for expression of common tastes and common fun, with a regard for the future of the generations yet to be, would surely help both Indian girls and boys to face the new freedom which is theirs, and to understand their responsibility for the quality of life that results from this new freedom.

#### THE GREATEST NEED

In the fifth place we frequently hear the statement made that the Indian girls are swift in responding to any emotional appeal, especially to a religious appeal, but slow in expressing their new resolves in action. Of course, this is true of all of us. But "peculiarly true of Indian girls," is the reply of those who are close to them in every-day life.

To understand the situation one must remember that in the old Indian life everything had some religious significance, games, ceremonies, animate and inanimate things. Religion was intrinsically a part of the every-day happenings of life, the plowing of a field, the building of a house, the search for food, and killing of one's enemies. Hence, in the new surroundings anything labeled "religious" will call forth a genuine response in the Indian students, whether it be going forward in a meeting, joining something, or attending the services of worship of their school or their church. Theirs often seems to be the attitude of the ancient Athenians who erected an altar "to the unknown God."

It must also be remembered that religion was not especially associated with morals in the older Indian life as it is in Christianity. To-day the Indian young people are frankly puzzled. Religion seems to be connected with churches or special services, with certain rites and ceremonies, especially on Sundays, but as they see it there is little connection between it and the way one studies or does the laundry on Monday. There are sometimes, for example, speeches of Christianity's approval of wars and then again of its disapproval of wars. "We do not know what to think," said an old Christian Indian man. "The Government and the missionaries told us we must not fight and we stopped. Then the war came and the Government and the missionaries told us it is right to fight, and we fought, and now many good people are telling us it is wrong to fight. What is right and wrong?"

In all this is an element which we must not forget, one which all who know the Indian people agree is always at work, namely, their keen powers of observation. In the old Indian life, keenness of observation of every phenomenon of nature brought a belief in a multiplicity of gods which seemed to them far more potent in every-day life than that Great Being of whom they were a part. With many gods came many fears, as the following quotation about Indian worship suggests. "To the earth gods, embodiments of the Great Universal Spirit, prayers and intricate ceremonies were offered, including sacrifices and personal mutilations. Feasts were given that impoverished families for a



year. There were lacerations and personal tortures. To the tutelar God, guardian spirit of the individual, sacrifices, gifts, and feasts were made or else the neglected spirit would turn against its ward. Despite the possession of a sacred bundle with its fetishes, fear of the spirits of the dead so possessed them that it over-rode all consideration of prudence and affection for a sick child or friend. Other evil spirits of the air, spirits of evil men, shooting from the distance with magic, possessed them. So they were continually in the bondage of fear. The medicine man at whose mercy were their lives and possessions in sickness and in health was exceedingly feared and honored to a degree that was worship."

To-day some knowledge of the findings of science has dispelled many of the old fears which keenness of observation without information and understanding brought to the Indian people. Now some of the fears have gone, but the same keenness of observation is turned upon the new teachings, resulting in bewilderment. "You say one thing and do another," was the verdict of an old Indian man whose imagination and religious longings were caught by the teachings of the Christ but whose keenness of observation recognized the divorce of His teachings from the life of the new day. "The Christian life is tied up tight in a roll," he added, "Unroll it so that we can all see it plain."

Perhaps it is this bewilderment which is at the root of much of the unrest of the Indian young people of to-day.

Hence, the swiftness of the emotional response of the Indian girls, especially to that which is religious, shows their desires for the highest. The slowness of expression of their resolves in action shows their need of seeing Christianity expressed in the daily life of the individual and nation. "The highest can not be spoken," it has been said. "It can not be spoken, but it can be acted." To meet it in action and to act it for themselves, this is the great need of the Indian girls. Until this need can be more adequately met the deep religious nature of the Indian people will remain unsatisfied.

#### WHAT MUST THE INDIAN GIRL UNDERSTAND ABOUT US?

All that we have said up to this point has been with the purpose of thinking together of what the Indian girl is like. Fairness to both races compels us to consider also what the Indian girl must understand in her turn and require of herself, if we are all to live together and give of our best to the development of individual, community, and national life, and if we are to share each other's experience and strength for the life of the whole.

#### THE LITTLE WAYS OF OTHERS

It is quite necessary in the first place that the girl make an effort in turn to understand the point of view and background of those of other races who are about her. It will take an extra effort on her part, for it should be easier for others, whose race has both passed through and studied her development, to understand her than it will be for her to understand them.

To understand other people, the Indian girls must take for granted the fundamental good-will of the vast majority of human beings. Her quick conclusion that no one can understand bars her from making any attempt to help them understand, and bars them from the privilege of understanding. For example, she needs to know that inattention to herself because of her friends' absorption in their own work and worries, even if selfish at times, is not dislike of her. She needs to know that laughter is far more often with others than at others. It is not malicious. All are in the process of learning from experience. The way to know more lies in a willingness to learn, even if it means exposing one's ignorance to the point of being laughed at. She need not be embarrassed or hurt by laughter or think that what may seem even rude is deliberately so.

Swift change of facial expression, frequent gestures, readiness to talk, speed in making first advances—all these characteristics of many races are democratic ways by which we are rather easily known to each other. Extreme expressions of these, as seen frequently in moving pictures, arouse an Indian boy's or girl's laughter even in the most pathetic part. It is not heartlessness on their part. They do not realize that perhaps a happy mean between these extreme expressions and their own extreme reserve in showing their thoughts and feelings would make friendship with, and understanding of others a bit easier.

These are only a few suggestions of how the Indian girl can begin her study of other people around her and learn to appreciate them as she herself wishes to be appreciated.

#### "RULES OF THE GAME"

In the second place she needs to understand the requirements of American life in the twentieth century if she chooses this life in preference to the life on the reservation. She must strive to think clearly and decide what her place in the life of our country is to be.

The three distinct groups of Indian girls to one of which she will very likely belong are as follows: There are those girls who are in the primitive, picturesque life of the old days. Even the question as to how long they will remain in that setting is scarcely theirs to decide. Then there is the very large group of girls who would go forward into new paths away from reservation life. New ideas and ideals urge them forward, but the pull of the traditions and customs of the old is also strong. The last and smallest of these group is constantly being enlarged by many who are forced into it by modern life. It is the group of those girls who are making their own way shoulder to shoulder with girls out in the world.

These last two groups are increasing rapidly in numbers year by year. They must learn and abide by the rules of life which govern normal people in the twentieth century, both in business and social relationships. For example, it is quite necessary for the girls to take into consideration the fact, as an Indian woman has said, that business-like methods such as the use of time clocks, account books and legal statutes, are not a reflection on their personal honesty and integrity, but only a part of the rules of the game in an overwhelmingly large and complex world. The Indian girl must learn that if she would have the desired rewards she must be willing to accept the responsibilities and fulfill the duties of life, whether as a member of her school community, her home church, or business group, or as a citizen in State and Nation. She must realize that the world owes no one a living. We have only that which we earn by hard work, supplemented by that which we make our own by appreciation and understanding, and can continue to keep only that which we use for the good of the whole.

#### THEIR OWN ASSETS

In the third place, and by no means of less importance, is the necessity that the Indian girls understand their own assets, as members of the Indian race for this task of living with other peoples, and realize what they have to offer from their goodly heritage, that they may play their part in the building up of the new social order.

Perhaps the best known and the most outstanding Indian characteristic is loyalty to family and friends. In this trait are included devotion to all children, responsibility for members of the tribe, and allegiance to friends of their own or another race. As the horizons of the Indian girls widen, their deep de-

votion to children will need to grow into an intelligent effort to bring about the day when all their children will be well born, with healthy family life and opportunities for education and development. Their loyalties and friendships will need to broaden to include members of other tribes and races.

Nowhere do we find greater admiration for brave leaders and for dauntless courage than among the Indian people of old. Closely connected with this is the ambition in the heart of every Indian child to be a leader, and no sacrifice which can be made is too great for the attainment of this end. In the work of to-day there is great need for Indian young people with courage and ambition equal to the warriors of old. May they go forward as dauntlessly in the face of temptation, discouragement, oft repeated failures, the hard grind and monotonous plodding into a new type of leadership!

"The only trait considered a sin by the old Indian people was stinginess!" Whether or not this be true, and however difficult it may be even now for the Indian people to distinguish between stinginess and economy, we know that generosity and hospitality are outstanding traits. Perhaps freedom from absorption in material possessions because of simplicity of living made comparatively easy the practice of these virtues. In the new world into which the girls are entering they will, with help, be able to make a finer distinction between generosity and an indiscriminate giving for the purpose of winning praise, between real hospitality and a vain display which may rob others of the necessities of life for months to come. Nor would we have the Indian girls proceed to the other extreme of heaping up possessions. In the old days they labored diligently for those things which were the necessities for the simple life of that time. To-day when their life is being lived on an increasingly complicated physical level, and on new cultural and spiritual levels, we would have the Indian girls discriminate in acquiring only such possessions as will mean for each one an ever-increasing fullness and richness of living.

Probably the first appeal the Indian makes to the outsider is through his picturesque surroundings and his art. No people could have produced the things we prize so highly had they not a truly artistic nature, tuned to the finer shades of meaning in many of the deeper things of life. We see this skill in their handicrafts, weaving, basketry, pottery making, silver, porcupine quill and bead work, in their love of form, color, and rhythm, and in their dramatic presentations. Would that to-day the Indian young people might bring the fine artistic sense of old into their new life! Would that they might have the courage to use their old keenness of observation and sense of humor in a discriminating choosing of that which they see, hear, produce, do, and wear in these days!

Underlying all characteristics and at the very foundations of Indian personality has been reverence as they faced the universe. This reverence was a part of their social heritage and in return there developed in them an answering dignity and reserve. They had great respect for the power they met in nature and for the same power as they saw it in individuals who, because of their great courage or age, had attained to places of influence in the tribe. It is not too great a leap from respect for the personality of a few to great respect for all human life and personality, including their own. This ancient dignity and reserve is still seen in the poise and lack of outward selfconsciousness of the Indian girls as they adapt themselves to new social customs. It still has high usefulness as a protection for the girls and their friends in moral crises. It can also be put to very practical and every-day use in helping them with quietness of spirit view the hectic world of tireless motion about them, and offer to it a little of their innate gentleness and calm.



## OUR COMMON TASK

We have already considered in the first place, what those interested in the Indian girl must know in order to understand her, and what she herself must know in order to understand the people and situations about her. If we are to help create a situation in which the girl can grow and develop that she may be ready to contribute of the best of her own heritage, both she and her friends must work together. It must be our common task.

But we are living in a busy practical world. What methods can we use? Details of methods for meeting every situation are not possible. The following four principles, however, which underly the suggestions already made both for the older person and the Indian girl herself must be our guides.

## WORKING TOGETHER

The first principle which we shall consider briefly takes us back again to the ancient custom of the Indian people, most popular among them to-day, and, interestingly enough, now considered by modern psychologists and educators as a practical way for meeting not only the problems of adolescence but of life in general. We refer to the Indian councils. To these councils all problems of living together were brought. All sides of the questions were presented, and each individual was free to express his thought in regard to these questions and his ideas of how they might be settled. Thus all understood the situation and accepted their responsibility for carrying out the solution agreed upon by the group. Surely Indian young people, with all the traditions of past councils behind them, will respond no less eagerly than do other girls to responsibility which they are capable of assuming, provided they are helped to see all sides of the problem, understand clearly the facts connected with it, and their relationship to it all. This is possible in groups of girls and older persons talking over together their common problems and working together for the good of all.

## RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUALITY

The second principle is respect for individual differences and tastes. Each person, older or younger, has her own likes and dislikes, ideas and ideals, however much like another's her clothing or her titles may be. The world would be monotonous beyond endurance were this not so.

Each has more or less difficulty in facing the world as it is and adjusting herself to it. Hence, there is need for reverent appreciation of every individual in her endeavors, however unsuccessful, and also in her failures which may after all teach as much as her successes, if only she can find, through the continued loyalty of her friends, the sense of security which human beings need if they are to develop in character.

Nor can all persons do the same things equally well. There are many who have talents along other lines than "reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic." Never before in the history of the world has there been such opportunity for a variety of talents. Never before have we heard so much about the need in education for freeing the way for the individual to add to the whole her own peculiar gift. All mental and efficiency tests and all efforts to discover the ability of each person show the great values we are now beginning to place upon every individual and the importance of her little thread in the pattern woven on the loom of life.

## SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING

The third and most comprehensive of these principles is a personal interest in the girl herself. This very likely began with most of us in our own school days, through stories of Indian bravery and picturesqueness. This interest is a



sentiment which may later become the first step in understanding the Indian people with whom one may be in touch. Sentiment alone, without understanding, will either hinder the development of the Indian girls, or it will die when it meets the test of living day by day on a reservation or in an Indian school. In a selfish person it may even change into disgust with the girls and their actions. With increasing understanding of why the girl acts as she does, and with some knowledge of her heritage from the past, such as we have mentioned above, then sentiment grows naturally into the next step, real interest in the girl. If to this is added mutual respect, then this interest may change to mutual affection and to the great, impelling influence, love, which is the vital need for the growth of everyone.

The expression of this affection presents a problem which differs according to the size of the dormitory or school in which the girl is living. The family life of a small school or of the cottage plan in a large school presents fewer difficulties. In other large schools, numbers make many expressions of affection almost impossible, partly because close acquaintance must precede it and largely because of the need of impartiality. To show affection and impartiality at the same time is an almost superhuman task. But both the happiness and development of the girl and of the older person call for some expression of affection as an outgrowth of this mutual appreciation of each other.

But how can this be done with so many girls? We must come back to the knowledge we have of Indian life in the olden days. We must remember that then the group was far more the unit than the individual. Is it not possible to capitalize this group consciousness, especially in the large schools where all work is carried on through organized groups? The glance of the eye, the tone of voice even in giving commands to companies, praise for group effort, and commendation for group accomplishment, all these will establish an atmosphere in which it will be possible for all to grow. In such an atmosphere, even the most reserved girl, in times of bewilderment or anxiety, may know that she may come freely to her older friend for the help and advice she so often hesitates to seek, but yet longs for from the depth of her heart, and must have if she is to develop into the fullness of womanhood.

#### OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

In conclusion we must not forget the fact that after all the ultimate reason for the existence of the Indian schools and for all education is experience in living and "preparation for life."

The Indian young people are now leaving the reservations. They are seeking occupations in towns and cities. Whether they wish it or not, they are losing their sense of tribal life, and they are becoming a real part of the communities which they are entering. In these communities the same mutual understanding and regard which is needed in schools is needed day by day, especially for these first years of adjustment to the new privileges and responsibilities as citizens of organized communities. If they receive this and are also true to their heritage, then the Indian girls may bring to the life of today some gifts sorely needed for deepening and strengthening its every fiber, and for the lifting of the quality of life to levels which approach more nearly the ideals toward which the peoples of all ages have struggled in their search for God.





